

## STRATEGIES : FOR PARENTS

***The best protection parents can offer their children who are involved in a bully/victim conflict is to foster their child's confidence and independence and to be willing to take action when needed. The following suggestions are offered to help parents identify appropriate responses to conflict experienced by their children at school:***

- Be careful not to convey to a child who is being victimized that something is wrong with him/her or that he/she deserves such treatment. When a child is subjected to abuse from his or her peers, it is not fair to fault the child's social skills. Respect is a basic right: All children are entitled to courteous and respectful treatment. Convince your child that he or she is not at fault and that the bully's behavior is the source of the problem.
- It is appropriate to call the school if your child is involved in a conflict as either a victim or a bully. Work collaboratively with school personnel to address the problem. Keep records of incidents so that you can be specific in your discussion with school personnel about your child's experiences at school.
- You may wish to arrange a conference with a teacher, principal or counselor. School personnel may be able to offer some practical advice to help you and your child. They may also be able to intervene directly with each of the participants. School personnel may have observed the conflict firsthand and may be able to corroborate your child's version of the incident, making it harder for the bully or the bully's parents to deny its authenticity.
- While it is often important to talk with the bully or his/ her parents, be careful in your approach. Speaking directly to the bully may signal to the bully that your child is a weakling. Speaking with the parents of a bully may not accomplish anything since lack of parental involvement in the child's life is a typical characteristic of parents of bullies. Parents of bullies may also fail to see anything wrong with bullying, equating it to "standing up for oneself."
- Offer support to your child but do not encourage dependence on you. Rescuing your child from challenges or assuming responsibility yourself when things are not going well does not teach your child independence. The more choices a child has to make, the more he or she develops independence, and independence can contribute to self-confidence.
- Do not encourage your child to be aggressive or to strike back. Chances are that it is not his or her nature to do so. Rather, teach your child to be assertive. A bully often is looking for an indication that his/her threats and intimidation are working. Tears or passive acceptance only reinforces the bully's behavior. A child who does not respond as the bully desires is not likely to be chosen as a victim. For example, children can be taught to respond to aggression with humor and assertions rather than acquiescence.
- Be patient. Conflict between children more than likely will not be resolved overnight. Be prepared to spend time with your child, encouraging your child to develop new interests or strengthen existing talents and skills that will help develop and improve his/her self-esteem. Also help your child to develop new or bolster existing friendships. Friends often serve as buffers to bullying.
- If the problem persists or escalates, you may need to seek an attorney's help or contact local law enforcement officials. Bullying or acts of bullying should not be tolerated in the school or the community. Students should not have to tolerate bullying at school any more than adults would tolerate such situations at work.

### **And always remember to...**

- Encourage your child to share problems with you with the assurance that it is not tattling
- Praise and encourage your child – a confident child is less likely to be bullied
- Help your child develop new friendships – new peers can provide a new chance
- Maintain contact with your child's school. Keep a detailed record of bullying episodes and communication with the school
- Support activities that bolster your child's self-esteem (sports, clubs, activities, etc.)

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## Parent Responses to Bullying

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### If Your Child Is Being Bullied

#### >>> **Bullying Warning Signs**

*The following may be signs that your child is being bullied:*

- Avoiding certain situations, people, or places (pretending to be sick so that he or she does not have to go to school)
- Changes in behavior (being withdrawn and passive, being overly active and aggressive, or being self-destructive)
- Frequent crying or feeling sad
- Signs of low self-esteem
- Being unwilling to speak or showing signs of fear when asked about certain situations, people, or places
- Signs of injuries
- Suddenly receiving lower grades or showing signs of learning problems
- Recurrent unexplained physical symptoms such as stomach pains and fatigue
- Comes home from school with torn, damaged, or missing clothing, books, and belongings.
- Has unexplained bruises, injuries, cuts, and scratches.
- Seems isolated from peers and may not have a good friend to share time with.
- Appears to be fearful about attending school, walking to and from school, or riding the bus.
- Develops a poor appetite, headaches, and stomach pains (particularly in the morning).
- Chooses a longer, "illogical" route for going to and from school.
- Asks for or takes extra money from family (money that may go to a bully).
- Appears anxious, distressed, unhappy, depressed or tearful when he or she comes home from school.
- Shows unexpected mood shifts, irritability, or sudden outbursts of temper.
- Has sleeping or eating problems.

#### >>> **What You Can Do**

First, listen to your child. Just talking about the problem and knowing that you care can be helpful and comforting. Make sure that your child knows that you do not blame or feel disappointed in him or her. Ask your child what he or she thinks should be done. What has your child tried? What worked and what didn't?

Encourage your child not to retaliate against the bully or to let the bully see how much he or she has upset your child. Getting a response just reinforces the bullying behavior. Tell your child that if at all possible, he or she should stay calm and respond evenly or firmly (e.g., "I don't like your teasing and I want you to stop right now" or "Stop doing that now. If you keep on, I'm going to report you to the principal."). Some children find it works to just say nothing and walk away. At other times, it can be more effective to make a joke, laugh at oneself, or to use humor to defuse the situation. Brainstorm with your child to develop some effective responses. Then role-play different approaches and responses with your child so that he or she will be prepared the next time.

Encourage your child to go immediately to a teacher, principal, or other nearby adult if he or she feels seriously threatened.

You may also want to help your child to develop strategies to avoid situations where bullying can happen and to avoid being alone with bullies. If bullying occurs on the way to or from school, your child may want to take a different route, leave at a different time, or find others to walk to and from school with. If bullying occurs at

school, your child may want to avoid areas that are isolated or unsupervised by adults, and stick with friends as much as possible.

Encourage your child to form strong friendships. A child or teen who has loyal friends is less likely to be singled out by a bully, and they can be valuable allies if your child is targeted. If your child lacks friends, help him or her to develop more friendships. Encourage your child to participate in positive social groups that meet his or her interests, such as after-school groups, church groups, extra-curricular activities, or teams. In addition to helping your child make friends, these activities can help to develop your child's special skills and rebuild his or her self-confidence.

In many cases, bullying won't require your involvement. If the bullying is persistent and is harming your child's emotional health, you need to intervene by talking to your child's teacher, school counselor, or principal about the problem in order to make sure your child is safe, that effective consequences are applied toward the bully, and that monitoring at school is adequate. Advocate for the involvement of the bully's parents. Suggest that the school implement a comprehensive anti-bullying program.

## **If Your Child Is Bullying Others**

### **>>> *Recognizing Kids Who Bully***

Children who bully increase their risk for engaging in other forms of antisocial behavior, such as juvenile delinquency, criminality and substance abuse. Bullying behavior should be taken seriously. Doing nothing implies that bullying is acceptable behavior. Typical bullying behavior includes:

- Physical Attacks: hitting, kicking, pushing, choking
- Verbal Attacks or Harassment: name calling, threatening, taunting, malicious teasing, rumor spreading, slandering
- Social isolation: intentional exclusion, making faces, obscene gestures, manipulating friendship relationships

### ***General Characteristics of Possible Bullies***

- Boys are more likely than girls to be bullies. However, girls are more likely to engage in "sneakier" forms of harassment.
- May be physically bigger and stronger than their victims.
- Have strong needs to dominate and control their peers.
- Are hot-tempered, easily angered, impulsive, and have a low frustration tolerance.
- Have difficulty conforming to rules.
- Are defiant and aggressive toward adults and authority figures. Adults may be frightened of the bully.
- Are good at talking themselves out of situations.
- Tend to have a relatively positive view of themselves (average or better than average self-esteem).
- Are more likely than their peers to engage in other antisocial behaviors.
- Are more likely to be less popular (particularly primary school students).
- Are more likely to have negative attitudes toward school and get lower grades (particularly junior high school students).

## **>>> What You Can Do**

If you learn that your child is bullying others, sit down and **talk with your child immediately**. It is important to take the problem seriously, because children and youth who bully others are at a greater risk for serious problems later in life. Give your child an opportunity to explain his/her behavior, but do not accept any excuses or justifications. Make it clear that bullying will not be tolerated and outline the consequences for further unacceptable behavior. If the problem is occurring at school, tell your child you support the school's right to punish him/her if the behavior persists.

**Encourage your child to try to understand how the bullying feels to his/her victim.** Bullies often have trouble empathizing with their victims so it is important to discuss with your child how bullying feels. How would your child feel if it happened to him/her? If you or someone close to you has been bullied in the past, you might want to share the story with your child, discussing the emotional impact.

**Increase your supervision of your child's activities and whereabouts,** and know who your child is spending time with. Make an effort to observe your child in one-on-one interactions. Stop any show of aggression immediately and help your child find other, nonviolent ways of reacting to certain situations. Praise your child for appropriate behaviors.

**If the bullying continues, you need to seek help for your child.** Without intervention, bullying can lead to serious academic, social, emotional and legal difficulties. Talk to your child's pediatrician, teacher, principal, school counselor, or your family physician. If the bullying continues, a comprehensive evaluation by a child and adolescent psychiatrist or other mental health professional should be arranged. The evaluation can help you and your child understand what is causing the bullying and help you develop a plan to stop the destructive behavior.

**Take the problem seriously. Children and youth who bully others often get into serious trouble in later life, and may receive criminal convictions. They may have continuing trouble in their relationships with others. Here are some things you can do to turn the situation around:**

1. Talk to your child, talk to his or her teachers and administrators. Keep in mind that a bully will try to deny or minimize his or her wrong-doing.
2. Make it clear to your child that you will not tolerate this kind of behavior, and discuss with your child the negative impact bullying has on the victims. Do not accept explanations that "it was all in fun."
3. Arrange for an effective, non-violent consequence, which is in proportion with the severity of your child's actions, and his or her age and stage of development. Corporal punishment carries the message that "might is right."
4. Increase your supervision of your child's activities and whereabouts, and who they are associating with. Spend time with your child, and set reasonable rules for their activities and curfews.
5. Co-operate with the school in modifying your child's aggressive behavior. Frequent communication with teachers and/or administrators is important to find out how your child is doing in changing his or her behavior.
6. Praise the efforts your child makes toward non-violent and responsible behavior, as well as for following home and school rules. Keep praising any efforts the child makes.
7. If your child is viewing violent television shows, including cartoons, and is playing violent video games, this will increase violent and aggressive behavior. Change family and child's viewing and play patterns to non-violent ones.
8. Make sure that your child is not seeing violence between members of his or her family. Modeling of aggressive behavior at home can lead to violence by the child against others at school and in later life.
9. Seek help from a school psychologist, social worker, or children's mental health centre in the community if you would like support in working with your child.

## Is your child is a 'bystander' to bullying?

>>> *How do I know if my child may be a Bystander to bullying?*

*A child who is a bystander to bullying may use the following excuses for not intervening or reporting the behavior they witness.*

- Saying the bully 'is my friend'
- Saying 'its not my problem'
- Saying that the victim is not their friend
- Saying that the victim is a 'loser'
- Saying that the victim 'deserved' to be bullied
- Saying that the bullying will 'toughen up' the victim.
- Saying that they would rather be part of the 'in group' than defend the victim
- Saying that there is nothing they can do about it.
- Saying that they don't want to be a 'tattle tale'
- Saying that they are afraid that they will 'be next' if they do anything.

>>> *What you can do*

- **Encourage** your child to empathize with the victim (step into their shoes)
- **Help** your child to understand that there is a difference between 'tattling' (trying to get someone else in trouble) and 'reporting' (protecting someone who is being or may be harmed)
- **Accompany** your child to the teacher or principal if they decide to report what they have witnessed.
- **Encourage** your child to mobilize his/her friends to join together to protect the victim. There is safety in numbers.
- **Explain** to your child that bullying does not 'toughen people up' but that it can cause real emotional and physical harm, which can be long lasting, and life threatening.
- **Teach** your child that being friends with those who inflict this kind of pain on their peers is not what you want them to do. Encourage them to find friends who value kindness and integrity.
- **Behave** with kindness, integrity and courage yourself, whenever you have the opportunity. Kids model the behaviors they see at home.
- **Reinforce** your child for accepting responsibility for his/her own behavior.